Fig. 13. Joseph fleeing Potiphar's wife, with domestic scene of women tending children and spinning. Vienna Genesis, Syria or Palestine (?), 6th century. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, cod. theol. grec. 31, fol. 16r.

WORK

MOLLY FULGHUM HEINTZ

The Art and Craft of Earning a Living

Regarding her occupation, a woman of the Byzantine Empire had few choices. Girls were expected to marry young, have children, and take care of their families and households. If a young woman had no dowry or no one to arrange a suitable marriage for her—a task usually entrusted to the parents—she might decide to dedicate her life to God and enter a convent.[1] A woman could also earn a living as a midwife, a wet nurse, or a seamstress; occasionally, primary sources attest to female innkeepers, cooks, and bathhouse keepers. Barring these possibilities, women resorted to acting, dancing, or prostitution, which were common although less socially acceptable ways for an otherwise destitute woman to support herself.

Aside from female saints, the women described in the greatest detail by Byzantine authors are empresses and aristocrats. Although they had a certain amount of freedom, these women were held to very much the same standards as average women in Byzantine society: modesty, piety, and self-control were traits of an ideal woman.[2] To preserve their modesty, young unmarried women rarely went out in public alone, and married women who did not have jobs outside the home left the house only for specific reasons, such as to go to the market, to church, or to the baths (cat. 69). By the middle Byzantine period, it was thought appropriate for women, when they did go out, to cover their heads.[3]

Byzantine women generally received less education than men, but they were not necessarily illiterate. Aristocrats were more likely to have a good education; a notable example is the twelfth-century chronicler Anna Komnene (1083–c. 1153/4).[4] Primary sources that discuss women should be used with caution, since they often have a religious bias, and they may exaggerate for rhetorical effect. Through a patchwork of primary texts, art, and artifacts, however, a picture of how an average Byzantine woman spent her time begins to emerge.

The main goal of marriage in Byzantium was to produce children. Infertility was viewed as a catastrophic problem within a marriage, and sources describe a variety of medical and miraculous remedies for the condition. A woman having difficulty conceiving might invoke the story of Abraham's wife Sarah, who became pregnant late in life (cat. 174). In a parallel story from the New Testament, Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, became pregnant with John the Baptist long after having been diagnosed as barren. One can imagine an older woman who wished to have a child turning to an icon of the Nativity of John the Baptist or the Virgin to ask for help (cats. 70, 186).

A woman about to give birth often relied on the expertise of a midwife and the help of other women, such as the nursemaids depicted on the icons with birth scenes (cats. 70, 186) and in a manuscript painting of the birth of Jacob and Esau from a twelfth-century Vatican Octateuch (fig. 23).[5] Midwives probably gained their knowledge through experience and common sense rather than formal education. Midwifery may not have been a full-time job, especially if the woman lived in a small town or village. Writing

in the fourth century, Eunapios of Sardis tells the story of a midwife who was also the hostess of a wine bar; one night, as she was in the middle of serving drinks, she was called away to deliver a baby.[6] Midwives also dealt with gynecological issues other than birth; women sought their advice on irregular bleeding or general illness.[7] A text on gynecology written between the sixth and twelfth centuries is signed "Metrodora" (who, from the feminine ending of the name, would seem to be female). The essay discusses various conditions that might affect the womb, tests for virginity, how to falsify virginity, and how to beautify the face and body with cosmetics.[8] It contains evidence that convent hospitals had female doctors.[9]

Motherhood was valued in Byzantium, and several authors describe their mothers with respect and affection. By the middle Byzantine period, the Virgin Mary was portrayed as an ideal mother and officially called by the epithet *Meter Theou,* Mother of God.[10] As early as the sixth and seventh centuries in Byzantine Egypt, a popular type of the Virgin was the Galaktotrophousa, which depicted Mary nursing the Christ child. Echoing the iconography of the Egyptian deity Isis nursing Harpocrates, the Galaktotrophousa imagery seems to have been too explicit or intimate to become widely accepted throughout the empire.[11]

Byzantine mothers breast-fed their children or employed the services of a wet nurse for the first few years of a child's life.[12] When children grew a little older, their mothers taught them Bible stories or rudimentary grammar. Later, girls would stay at home with their mothers and learn how to run a household, while boys might attend private lessons in grammar and other subjects. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, girls may have had more access to a limited formal education.[13] Often mothers played an aggressive role in arranging their children's studies. The eleventh-century writer Michael Psellos mentions his mother's dedication to giving him an excellent education.[14]

A woman's second most important function, after child care, was running the household. Large houses often had an area designated as the *gynaikonites,* or "women's quarters," a series of rooms where women carried out their duties and spent most of their time.[15] Wealthy households employed servants or had slaves whom the woman of the house would oversee on a daily basis. Not only was a woman responsible for monitoring the food supplies and the cooking, but she also was in charge of the household furnishings and keeping her family clothed. Some Byzantine women also engaged in agricultural chores, such as working in the fields, harvesting crops, and gathering olives and other produce that they sold at the market (cat. 71).

To produce textiles for everyday use and simple clothing, women spent a great deal of their time spinning and weaving. These were not only practical tasks; they were regarded as the only "proper" pastime for a woman.[16] When a notable woman did not spin and weave regularly, Byzantine authors were quick to point that out. For example, Anna Komnene, probably one of the most educated women in Byzantine history, was said to have "exchanged the distaff and spindle for learning."[17]

Spinning and weaving have long been the preferred activities for the ideal female, from Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey* to the good wife in the Book of Proverbs.[18] Roman

funerary inscriptions, as well as imagery on grave steles and tombs, reflect the importance of associating the woman of the house with spinning and weaving. This is exemplified in the Phrygian stele in this exhibition (cat. 73), depicting a woman's weaving implements in relief. The Virgin, the ultimate female role model in Christianity, is held to the same standard: in scenes of the Annunciation in Byzantine art she is often shown spinning (see cat. 83), and apocryphal stories about her life describe how, as a young girl, she was given a skein of purple wool to weave the curtain that demarcated the Holy of Holies at the Temple in Jerusalem.[19] A folio from the sixth-century Vienna Genesis conveys the message in a less subtle way (fig. 13). The scene opposes "ideal" women spinning and taking care of children (upper register, right; lower register) with Potiphar's wife, who attempts to seduce Joseph (upper register, left).[20]

The *vitae* of many female saints refer to their virtuous spinning and weaving. The ninth-century Saint Theodora of Thessaloniki "set her hands to the spindle; and preparing and spinning the very coarse fibers of flax that had been rejected, and the useless wool tossed into the dung heaps, she would make bags."[21] The tenth-century Saint Thomaïs of Lesbos "put her whole hand to the spindle. She worked skillfully and artfully to weave on the loom fabrics of various colors. . . . Her hands labored for the sake of the poor and wove tunics for the naked."[22] These were the examples Byzantine women were compelled to follow if they wished to please God.[23]

Women were also involved with textile production on a professional level.[24] In the early Byzantine period, women worked in male-run silk factories, although they seem to have been confined to spinning.[25] In a short treatise titled "On the Female Festival of Agathe," Psellos briefly describes a procession and celebration that took place annually on May 12 in Constantinople.[26] It has been suggested that because the female participants were divided into categories of carders, spinners, and weavers, they might have been professional cloth makers, possibly even members of a guild. This hypothesis seems to be supported by the tenth-century *Book of the Eparch,* a legal text codifying the rules and regulations of the Constantinopolitan guilds under the supervision of the city's prefect. Chapter VII discusses regulations applying to the raw silk dressers, "whether men or women."[27]

While weaving was a job performed by both men and women, spinning historically remained a female activity performed in the home. The loom was a standard piece of domestic furniture,[28] used for weaving the household linens and clothing. Not only did spinning and weaving confine a woman to the physical space of the home, but their products, which included curtains for the windows and doorways, further circumscribed her space. While large-scale tapestries for wall hangings may have been produced in weaving workshops run by men, smaller, tapestry-woven textiles may have been produced by women who worked at home (cats. 80–82, 89–96, 161–63).

In the early Byzantine period, vestiges of the old Roman Empire heavily influenced many aspects of life. For example, despite protests from the Church, women still attended popular spectacles at the theater and chariot races in the hippodrome, and they were also among the performers there. Female dancers, often shown with billowing veils, may be seen on the obelisk base of Theodosios I (r. 379–95) *in situ* in the former Hippodrome of

Fig. 14. Dancer performing before the imperial family (detail). Pyxis, mid-14th or early 15th century. Ivory. Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C., 36.24.

Constantinople and on the sixth-century victory stele of the charioteer Porphyrios.[29] They also performed at civic festivals and imperial celebrations, even in the late Byzantine period, as depicted on an ivory pyxis thought to commemorate the installation of John VII Palaiologos as emperor in Thessaloniki around 1403 (fig. 14).[30]

The silver statuette of the seated dancer in this exhibition is a poignant representation of a female entertainer (cat. 72). Often slaves, actresses and dancers were considered to be a low class of women who could have a corrupting influence on society. As one scholar points out, any woman on public display was thought to be sexually available. This even included barmaids.[31] Female performers participated in the mime skits that were commonly part of theatrical shows; the skits often had erotic overtones or included lewd gestures and situations.[32] Those who participated in mime were frequently labeled prostitutes *(pornai)*, even though this was not necessarily the case.[33]

Female performers apparently worked on a "freelance" basis as well, when the wealthy hired them to perform at private parties.[34] A letter composed by Artemisia of Philadelphia survives on a third-century papyrus:

> *To Isidora, castanet dancer, from Artemisia of the village of Philadelphia. I wish to engage you with two other dancers to perform at the festival at my house for six days. . . . You will receive as pay 36 drachmas for each day, and for the entire period 4 artabas of barley and 20 pairs of bread loaves. And whatsoever gold and ornaments you may bring down, we will guard these safely; and we will furnish you with two donkeys when you come down to us and a like number when you go back to the city.*[35]

Entertainers who were highly sought after could become wealthy themselves. One such was Pelagia, a famous actress *(mimas)* from Antioch, who eventually converted to Christianity and later became a saint.[36] Notably, any female entertainer who left the stage was required by law to convert to Christianity. Apparently, authorities saw this as a way to stifle latent immoral impulses that could endanger society.[37] Finally, in the seventh century, the Council in Trullo banned "public dances by women which are able to cause much impurity and harm."[38] In fact, the public perception of acting and dancing was so negative that, despite cases of financial success, it was sometimes difficult to recruit new members for theatrical troupes.[39] It may be for this reason that many entertainers were slaves or their descendants, who were compelled to perform.

Slaves were often prisoners of war or those born in captivity. Literary evidence concerning female domestic slaves in the Roman period indicates that they performed daily tasks, such as spinning and weaving, under the supervision of the woman of the house, and the same seems to have been true in Byzantium.[40] In images from the period, female slaves or servants most often appear in the company of an aristocratic woman, helping her with her toilet, such as on the Projecta casket in the British Museum (fig. 20), or assisting with childbirth, as in the icon of the Nativity of John the Baptist (cat. 70). Legally, slaves could not marry, because they owned no property; however, a partnership *(contubernium)* between male and female could be acknowledged by their owner.[41] While Christian authors such as the fourth-century bishop Saint Gregory of Nazianzos condemned slavery, it was common in Byzantium until the late period.[42]

Some women in Byzantium supported themselves in ways that were defined by sex. The law differentiated several categories of sexual relationships between men and women. Adultery was both a legal and a religious issue in Byzantium, and was often the subject of ecclesiastical authors and priests, who condemned sex outside the union of marriage. In general, there was a double standard for men and women concerning adultery: "a married woman was an adulteress if she had any male sexual partner other than her husband; whereas a man was an adulterer, whether or not he was himself married, only if his partner was a married woman."[43] Several emperors were reported to have had mistresses, the best known of whom is Skleraina, the companion of Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–55).[44] The daughter of a nobleman, Skleraina was given the title of *sebaste*, which usually indicated a blood relationship to the imperial family, and was invited to live in the palace with the emperor and his wife, the empress Zoe.

Concubinage, a stable sexual relationship between a man and a woman usually of a lower class, was also common in Byzantium. Often this involved cohabitation and in practice was indistinguishable from marriage. The question of property and titles due the children of concubines was debated in Byzantine law.[45]

Although their legal status was different, concubines *(pallakai)* and prostitutes *(pornai)* were sometimes equated in religious texts.[46] Prostitutes appear frequently in primary sources, and while this may attest to the widespread nature of prostitution in Byzantium, the converted prostitute may also be understood as a literary topos, based on the model of the conversion of Mary Magdalene in the New Testament. For example, Pelagia, the famous actress in late antiquity who converted to Christianity, is called "Pelagia the Harlot" in the early-eleventh-century *Menologion* of Basil II. Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great (r. 324–37) and later a saint, was supposedly a prostitute at her father's inn before her marriage. Roadside inns were notorious haunts of women of ill repute.[47]

The fact that most women had limited education precluded them from holding positions that required refined reading and writing skills. While aristocratic women often administered estates and managed large properties, the job of an average woman was to manage the day-to-day running of the home.

1. Garland 1988, 366–67.

2. Ibid., 371–74.

3. Kekaumenos, the eleventh-century author of the *Strategikon* (a manual of advice), was an advocate of strict standards for female behavior (Garland 1988, 369–72).

4. Anna Komnene, who wrote the *Alexiad*, a history of the reign of her father, the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118), is one of the best-known Byzantine female authors.

5. The Octateuch, composed of the first eight books of the Old Testament, circulated as a separate volume from the ninth or tenth century.

6. Clark 1993, 69; Eunapius 1952, 463.

7. Clark 1993, 69.

8. Patlagean 1987, 618–19; Metrodora 1953.

9. Miller 1985, 15, 201, 214.

10. Kalavrezou 1990, 168–72.

11. Ibid., 166.

12. Clark 1993, 45, 87.

13. Garland 1988, 368.

14. Kazhdan and Epstein 1985, 123.

15. Garland 1988, 382. Evelyne Patlagean states that for the Byzantine home "the segregation of women was the first principle of interior design" (Patlagean 1987, 573).

16. Michael Psellos, in his essay on his daughter Styliane, notes that weaving was one of her "most important" tasks (Garland 1988, 368).

17. See George Tournikos' funeral oration for Anna Komnene (Garland 1988, 379).

18. Weaving has been considered "women's work," as Elizabeth Barber demonstrates, since prehistoric times, and the notion that a virtuous woman spins and weaves is also ancient (Barber 1994, 185–88).

19. Mary receiving the wool is depicted in mosaic in the narthex of the Chora church in Constantinople (Underwood 1966, pls. 130–34).

20. Throughout the Middle Ages, the motif of weaving could also have had an ambiguous or negative meaning, reflecting the belief that women could be crafty or even witches, reciting spells that, as the women wove, were "trapped" in the cloth (Tatar, 1987, 106–33).

21. Talbot 1996, 200.

22. Ibid., 303–4.

23. Nicholas Constas discusses "domiciled female passivity" of women in the Christian world; while the imagery of the Virgin and holy women weaving may have done nothing directly to confine women to their traditional domestic roles, it reinforced existing ideas of what constituted appropriate behavior (Constas 1995, 186).

24. Quenemoen 1996, 157.

25. Lopez 1945, 6.

26. Laiou 1986, vol. 1, 111–22.

27. Ibid., 116; Koder 1991, ch. 4–8. In the Roman period, however, professional spinners (*quasillariae*) were not allowed to form a guild.

28. See Clark 1993, 30–39.

29. Cameron 1973.

30. Oikonomides 1977, 330–31; alternatively, Weitzmann dates the pyxis to circa 1355 and suggests that it represents the Kantakouzenos imperial family (Weitzmann 1972, vol. 3, 77–82, cat. 31).

31. Clark 1993, 29.

32. Webb 1997, 121.

33. Ibid., 123. A well-known account of a performer/prostitute is that of Theodora, who was an entertainer before her marriage to the emperor Justinian (r. 527–65). The sixth-century author Prokopios describes Theodora as a prostitute who had a talent only for stripping. He goes to extreme lengths to describe her lascivious nature and her multiple sexual partners, even accusing her of bewitching the emperor (*Secret History* 9.1–30). It may be argued that this is a highly rhetorical text meant to portray Theodora in the worst possible light. In another book, a straightforward account of buildings in Constantinople, Prokopios describes a palace converted into a convent by Justinian and Theodora (*Buildings* 1.9.2–9). Named "Repentance," it was specifically for reformed prostitutes (Clark 1993, 30–31; Webb 1997, 128).

34. Webb 1997, 129.

35. *Art and Holy Powers* 1989, 222, citing W. L. Westerman and C. J. Kraemer.

36. Clark 1993, 31, 129.

37. Ibid., 29–30.

38. Webb 1997, 130.

39. Clark 1993.

40. A. Wallace-Hadrill describes how the mistress of the house doled out a *pensum*, a daily portion of wool, to be woven by each slave girl. A house in Pompeii bears a graffito with the names of each slave girl and the size of her *pensum*. "The slave girl working late into the night by lamplight to finish her *pensum* is a cliché" (Wallace-Hadrill 1996, 112).

41. Clark 1993, 34.

42. Kazhdan and Epstein 1985, 9–10.

43. Clark 1993, 29.

44. In the ninth century, the emperor Leo VI was notorious for his philandering (ibid., 35).

45. Beaucamp 1990, 195–200; Clark 1993, 31.

46. Patlagean 1987, 602.

47. Clark 1993, 29–31.

69

69 Homiletic Fragment Advising Women on Public Conduct

Egypt, before August 30, 823[1]
Parchment leaf
H. 33.9 cm, w. 25.3 cm
The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of J. P. Morgan (1867–1943); 1924. MS M.579

COLLECTION HISTORY Found in 1910 in a cache of manuscripts excavated at the site of the Monastery of Saint Michael at Sôpehes, near contemporary Al-Hamuli in the Fayum, Egypt; purchased in Paris in 1911 for J. Pierpont Morgan from Arthur Sambon, agent for an owners' consortium including J. Kalebdian.

PUBLISHED Depuydt 1993, vol 1., 165–66, cat. 83.

A page from a lost parchment codex, this fragment of an unidentified homily was reused to paste down the overleaf inside the cover of an early ninth-century lectionary, a book of scriptural passages, sometimes accompanied by sermons, used on feast days. The only decorations are a lower band and rectangular headpiece of knotted rope interlace (upper right), below which the surviving text of approximately thirty-four lines is arranged in two columns on the recto of the ruled folio. The text is in Sahidic, the dialect spoken by the Copts, the Egyptian Christian minority of Egypt, in the Byzantine and Islamic periods. The script is Greek, primarily uppercase, with upright letters. The literary style and content of the homily suggest that it derives from the Church fathers and was probably translated from the Greek, like most other Coptic texts.

Partially based on Proverbs 9:13–17, the homily reflects the widespread Byzantine belief that women were of inferior moral status and more fallible than men. It addresses first men, then women, in the second person, exhorting them to avoid contact with persons of the opposite sex in the streets and baths.

The woman "openly visible in the streets, spending time with the passersby," is portrayed as promiscuous, tempting men "straight in their ways" to engage in illicit sex. "Run far away and do not delay at her place, and do not fix your eyes upon her," the homilist admonishes. In contrast, women who "wish to become faithful" are advised to be monogamous and dress modestly: "Please your husband only, and cover your head in the streets so that your female beauty become dark."[2] The text underlines the standard comportment of married Byzantine women, who wore mantles over their heads in public and were encouraged to leave the house only when necessary—for example, to attend church or to bathe.[3]

Most early Byzantine cities had κοινά λουτρά (public baths) that were open to women. Some were ἀνδρόγυνα λουτρά (coed baths)[4] and some, such as the small one near the Baths of Zeuxippos in Constantinople, were for women only. In Egypt there is evidence of several large double baths that served pilgrims and had separate facilities for men and women.[5] Although the homily does not forbid women to bathe, it strongly warns against common bathing as immodest: "Remove yourself so as not to wash yourself together with virgin young boys. For it is a disgrace that a faithful woman should wash herself with men. For if a woman covers her face, hiding herself from unknown young lads, how can she take a bath with men?"

The Church fathers considered women more susceptible than men to carnal temptation, but their level of tolerance varied: The Pseudo-Clemens recommended that chaste women bathe around ten o'clock in the morning to avoid "many eyes," but not at midday because the bath would be full at that time.[6] The existence of coed baths led John Chrysostom to prohibit women from bathing, condemning them, especially widows, who tended to linger in the baths with men, as a stain on the pure Church.[7] He faulted mothers for allowing their daughters to wear cosmetics and to bathe frequently, and deplored the female practices of gossiping and flaunting gold jewelry in the bath.[8] In his stern address to virgins, Athanasios of Alexandria warned: "Do not go needlessly to the bath if you are healthy and, in order to wash yourself, do not submerge your entire body in the water if you are sanctified to God."[9] Bathing for medicinal purposes was, however, acceptable.

The prescriptive character of this homily fragment, also pronounced in the writings of the Church fathers, and the large number of baths open to women, suggest that women actively participated in the vibrant bathing culture of the early Byzantine period. EG

1. The *terminus ante quem* is provided by the colophon of Morgan Library M162, in which this leaf was used as a pastedown (Depuydt 1993, vol. 1, 165–66, cat. 83).

2. Ibid.

3. Clark 1993, 108–9; Chrysostom cites the attendance at bath and church as among the few occasions on which a chaste woman is permitted to leave the house (Berger 1982, 40, n. 39). For headdresses worn by Byzantine women, see Emmanuel 1995.

4. The Greek Church father Clement of Alexandria (second-to-third century) criticizes the κοινά λουτρά, and Palladios, bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia (fourth-to-fifth century), mentions the ἀνδρόγυνα λουτρά (Berger 1982, 41). Around 475, Constantinople had nine large public baths and 153 private baths (ibid., 28–29).

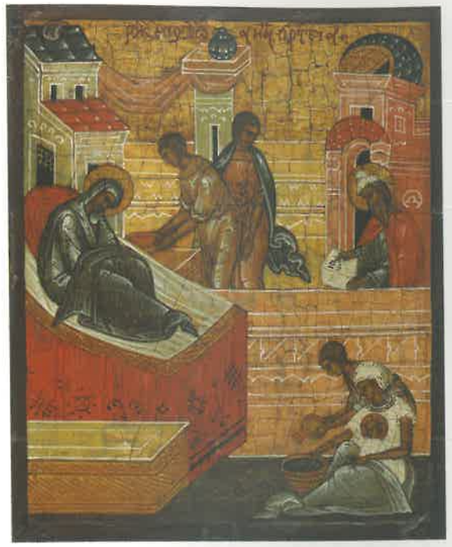
5. At Abu Mena and Menuthis in Canopus (ibid., 33, 43).

6. Ibid., 39, 42, n. 54.

7. Ibid., 41, n. 49.

8. Ibid., 39, nn. 35, 36; 60; 218. The reproach is not specifically Christian; Libanios, the fourth-century pagan orator of Antioch, also mentions the chattering of a woman as she returned from the bath (ibid., 40, n. 38).

9. Ibid., 39, n. 34.



70

70 Icon of the Birth of John the Baptist

Russian, Novgorod School, late 15th century (?)
Tempera on wood panel
H. 13.3 cm, w. 10.8 cm
Inscription, in Russian: The Nativity of Saint John Prodromos
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Bequest of Thomas Whittemore, 1951.31.26

COLLECTION HISTORY Thomas Whittemore collection.

PUBLISHED *Russian Icons* 1988, cat. 8.

This small panel represents the birth of Saint John the Baptist (Luke 1:57–66). The life of John has several parallels with that of Christ, whom he prefigures in the Gospels (hence the epithet Prodromos, or Forerunner).[1] Elizabeth, a kinswoman of the Virgin Mary, was advanced in age. Her husband, Zacharias, received a visit from the archangel Gabriel, who told him that his wife, despite her years, would soon conceive a son who "will be great before the Lord" (Luke 1:15). At the Annuciation of Christ's birth, the same angel told Mary about Elizabeth, who "in her old age has also conceived a son" (Luke 1:36).

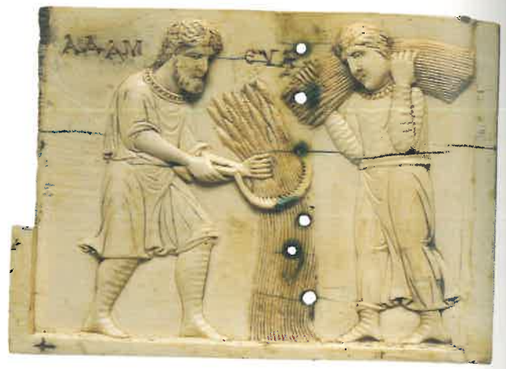
Saint John is depicted in the right foreground of the composition, as a tiny baby in the lap of the midwife, who prepares to bathe him with the assistance of a second woman. John's mother sits on a bed at left, while his father sits at right beyond a low wall and writes in a book. Also beyond the wall are two other female attendants. In the background, filling the upper portion of the composition, are buildings with slanted and domed tile roofs and a central column festooned with drapery.

Against a gilded background the icon is painted in bright blue, red, orange-red, green, pinks, and olive skin tones. Facial features and minor details are clear and precise for such a small panel, suggesting comparisons with painted miniatures in Byzantine manuscripts.

The style of the icon places it in the Russian Novgorod School of the second half of the fifteenth century.[2] Its size suggests that it was used in a private context. The story of Elizabeth's conception at an advanced age, the subject of birth in general, and the representations of women in this scene may have resonated with the Byzantine viewer. For us, the icon offers information about the activities of women at home and depicts the work of the midwife (see also cat. 186). MFH

1. Isaiah 40:3 ("A voice cries: in the wilderness, prepare a way for the Lord. . . .") is often interpreted as foreshadowing the birth of John.

2. Natalia Teteriatnikov dates the icon to the end of the fifteenth century (*Russian Icons* 1988, cat. 8).



71

71 Plaque with Adam and Eve at the Forge

Constantinople (?), Byzantine, 11th–12th century
Ivory
H. 6.7 cm, w. 9.8 cm
Inscription: left, ΑΔΑ/M (Adam); right, ЄVA (Eva)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.139)

COLLECTION HISTORY G. Brauer, Paris 1909.

PUBLISHED Goldschmidt and Weitzmann 1930, vol. 1, 54–55, cat. 93; *Glory of Byzantium* 1997, 234–36, cat. 158; Evans et al. 2001, 52; Kalavrezou 2002, 245, fig. 8.

This high-quality ivory plaque of Adam and Eve toiling at the forge (left) was originally part of the exterior decoration of a box showing scenes from Genesis. Three other panels have been recognized as belonging to the same ensemble.[1] The panel that is closest in size and theme, also in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (right),[2] depicts Adam and Eve harvesting. Both these panels show the couple surviving by the sweat of their brow after their expulsion from Paradise.

In cat. 71, Adam holds a piece of iron on the forge and is about to strike it to give it shape. Eve, her hair covered, kneels close to the fire, working the bellows with both hands. The figures are labeled. In assisting at the forge, Eve participates in work not usually perceived as a woman's domain; she is not shown spinning, the activity that was most typical of a woman's role in the Byzantine household.

Everyday activities were rarely depicted with contemporary figures in Byzantine art, but such activities can be identified indirectly: Adam and Eve have become the representative couple whose destiny, to work for their survival and well-being on earth, depends on their cooperation.[2] As examples of the difficulties a couple encounters in life, these scenes suggest that marital harmony is achieved through collaboration in hard work. IK

1. *Glory of Byzantium* 1997, 234–36, cat. 158.

2. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.138).

3. A number of ivory boxes depict the story of Adam and Eve. The cycle begins with their life in Paradise and proceeds to their fall, their expulsion, and scenes of labor that are not part of the biblical narrative.

72 Seated Dancer

Eastern Greece, Roman-Byzantine, late 4th century
Silver and gold
H. 12.0 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Frederick Brown Fund, 69.72

COLLECTION HISTORY Mathias Komor collection.

PUBLISHED Vermeule 1971, 404, figs. 55–56; Vermeule 1974a, 33–34, cat. 97; *Romans and Barbarians* 1976, 115, cat. 124; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1981, cat. 18; Cahn and Kaufmann 1984, 320; *Trésors d'orfèvrerie* 1989, 261, cat. 223; *I, Claudia* 1996, 89–90, cat. 53.

72

This silver statuette represents a woman seated on a stool. Her right ankle rests on her left knee, and she holds her right foot in both hands. Bands around her upper arms, wrists, chest, and slippers are rendered in gold. She wears a thin, tight tunic that is gathered at the waist and extends to mid-thigh. Circles delicately incised at the top of each shoulder represent the clasps of her tunic. Her hair, also gilded, is pulled back from her face, gathered at the top of her head, and secured by a circle of beads. The rounded stool rests on a small platform; its cushion and base are inlaid with gold, as are the lion-headed ornaments at the corners of the base.

The gold jewelry and revealing costume of this figure indicate that the statuette depicts a professional dancer. In the Byzantine world, dancing, both as a pastime and a profession, was a predominantly female activity.[1] Women danced to celebrate important occasions, such as marriages or festivals, and professional dancers took to the stage of the theater and the hippodrome in public performances or were hired as entertainers for private parties.[2] Church writers and imperial laws criticized dancing, particularly by women in public, but the frequency of censorious references to female dancers bespeaks the widespread popularity of these performances.[3] Byzantine works of art indicate that female dancers were also an integral part of legitimate public events such as imperial appearances (fig. 14), and presumably the same women performed at sanctioned and unsanctioned spectacles.[4]

Although a select number of female performers may have grown wealthy through their art—for example, the dancer Pelagia, who later became a saint—the majority of these women would have made very modest livings and were generally of low social status.[5] Indeed, because they appeared minimally clad and heavily adorned in public, dancers were seen in the same light as prostitutes.[6]

This statue is a rare representation of a working woman preparing for her job. Pagan texts relished and Christian texts condemned the lewd gestures and erotic movements of the dance.[7] But sitting in repose, this figure does not elicit erotic associations. The sympathetic portrayal focuses instead on the woman's humanity, thereby contrasting with the image of professional dancers conveyed by contemporary laws and religious texts. AW

1. For discussion of the "gendered nature" of dance in Byzantium, see Webb 1997, 125–26.

2. For discussion of a contract for a private dance performance, see Webb 1997, 129–30, and Westermann 1924, 134–44. For a reference to women dancing in civic and guild festivals, see Laiou 1986, vol. 1, 113, 122.

3. Webb 1997, 122–23, 131–35; Magoulias 1971, 246–52.

4. Examples of such works are the fourth-century marble base of the obelisk of Theodosios I that still stands on the *spina* of the Hippodrome in Istanbul and an eleventh-century enamel crown of Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–55), in the Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Budapest, Hungary (99/1860), as well as (see fig. 14) the fourteenth-century ivory pyxis depicting an emperor and his retinue, in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington D.C. (36.24).

5. For the *vita* of Pelagia, see Petitmengin 1981, 23–37; Brock and Harvey 1987, 40–62.

6. Magoulias 1971, 246–52; Petitmengin 1981, vol. 1, 23–37; Procopius 1966, 82–85. As Webb notes, however, "the frequent assimilation of performers to prostitutes *(pornai)* appears as a way of expressing moral disapprobation rather than as a statement of fact about the status of performers" (Webb 1997, 123).

7. Webb 1997, 122–23; Fear 1996, 178–79.

73

73 Gable of a Funerary Stele with Family and Domestic Implements

Asia Minor, Late Roman, 230–40
White marble
L. 47 cm, w. 42 cm, d. 7 cm
Inscription: MIΩ [incomplete]
University of Toronto, Malcove Collection, M82.323

COLLECTION HISTORY Collection of Dr. Lillian Malcove.

PUBLISHED Campbell 1985, 21–23, cat. 17.

This late Roman stele depicts a family with its implements of daily life. Representations of a woman and her husband occupy an abbreviated roundel on the upper portion. Above them is a smaller roundel possibly depicting the couple's daughter. The hair of both females is parted in the middle and pulled to the back of the head. The woman's hairstyle is more elaborate, with sections layered in waves on either side.[1] She wears a ribbon ornament or hair net that covers the hairline and the central part,[2] and a short veil ending in tassels covers her head. Her jewelry consists of small teardrop earrings and a necklace with round and ivy-leaf-shaped pendants. The smaller female above wears only a simple incised necklace. Each of the three figures is dressed in a tunic and a cloak in which the right arm is cradled. The oversized right hand of each is exposed and held against the chest.[3]

Objects relating to the figures are carved in relief around the roundels. A variety of personal and domestic implements occupies the area to the right of the woman. Included are a spindle connected by an incised thread to a distaff, perfume bottles, a comb, and a mirror with a handle decorated with duck heads. The spindle and distaff indicate that spinning and weaving probably occupied a large portion of the woman's time.[4] The motif of the noble female spinning and weaving is an ancient one, represented by Penelope in the *Odyssey* and later, in Christian art, by Mary spinning at the Annunciation (cat. 83).[5] The other implements all relate to grooming and to the image of a well-to-do household.

A weaving comb similar to the one depicted on the stele is included in this exhibition (cat. 79). To the left of the smaller bust in the upper roundel, a bird seated on a ball, a comb, and possibly a piece of fruit represent the world of children in general and identify the child as a girl. Birds were common pets for women and children in the Roman period.[6] To the left of the husband is a vine, indicating a possible link with viticulture.

The stele is one of a large group of funerary steles produced in Phrygia during the Severan period and known as *Türstein*, or steles with doors.[7] The similarity of the objects depicted on the stele to the images and objects gathered in the exhibition suggests that, for women, the arrival of Christianity may have had little impact on quotidian routine. Spinning and weaving represented a woman's work and contribution to the household. The perfume, combs, and jewelry depicted here all played a role in the daily life of Byzantine women. More significant, the wife and mother in cat. 73 is the same size as her husband, indicating that her role in the family unit was equal in importance to his. In Byzantium, however, although women may have continued to run the household, their role was not acknowledged in the same highly visible way that it was in the Roman period. MFH

1. A similar hairstyle is found on a statuary head possibly depicting Lucilla, the wife of the emperor Lucius Verus (r. 161–69 A.D.). The head was found near Phrygia and dates to 165–85 (Vermeule 1978, 119).

2. A similar type of headdress appears on a stele from Palmyra dating to the late second century A.D. (*Romans and Barbarians* 1976, fig. 61).

3. Parallels for this type of dress may be found on contemporary Roman funeral monuments (Kleiner 1977, fig. 87).

4. In the Roman period, the funerary monuments of women often dipicted wool baskets, symbolizing the life of a virtuous woman who provided for her household. If there was no room to represent spinning and weaving implements on a grave marker, the inscription *lanam fecit* (she spun) was added.

5. A first-century A.D. Roman stele from Este depicts a distaff and spindle (D'Ambra 1993a, fig. 37). For a discussion of Penelope as the model of the ideal female and the related weaving frieze on Domitian's Forum Transitorium, see D'Ambra 1993a, 109, and D'Ambra 1993b.

6. Campbell 1985, 24.

7. For a complete discussion of these steles, see Waelkens 1986.

74 Spindle

Roman (?), 1st–4th century
Bone
Shaft: l. 16.6 cm, diam. 0.9 cm; disc: diam. 3.2 cm
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Transfer from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1978.495.73
UNPUBLISHED

75 Needle

Roman (?), 1st–4th century
Bone
Shaft: l. 10.15 cm, diam. 0.55 cm; eye: l. 0.7 cm, w. 0.25 cm
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Transfer from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1978.495.76
UNPUBLISHED

76 Needle

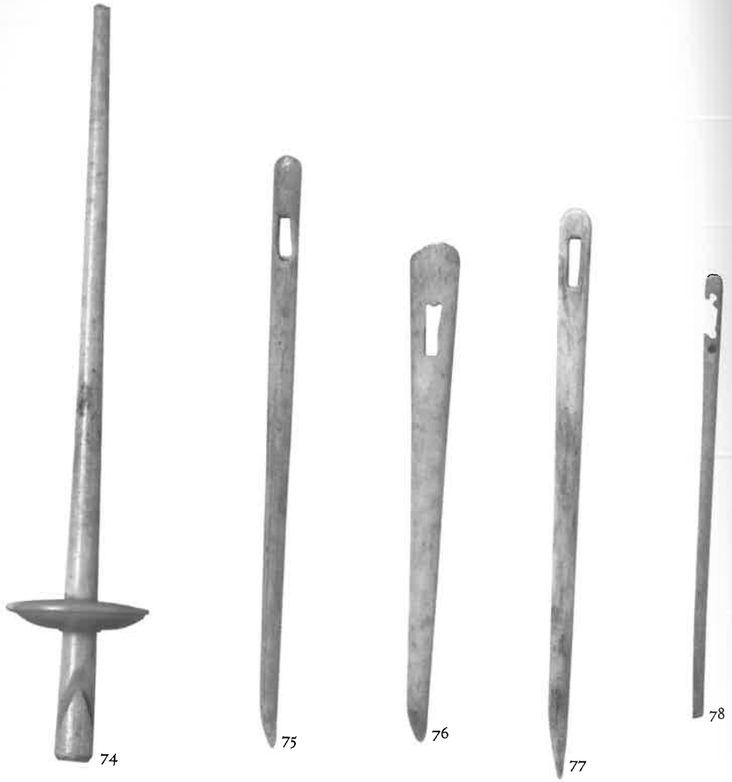
Roman (?), 1st–4th century
Bone
Shaft: l. 8.75 cm, diam. 0.75; eye: l. 0.9 cm, w. 0.2 cm
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Transfer from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1978.495.77
UNPUBLISHED

77 Needle

Roman (?), 1st–4th century
Bone
Shaft: l. 9.75 cm, diam. 0.55 cm; eye: l. 0.85 cm, w. 0.2 cm
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Transfer from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1978.495.78
UNPUBLISHED

78 Needle

Roman (?), 1st–4th century
Bone
Shaft: l. 7.7 cm, diam. 0.3 cm; eye: l. 0.6 cm, w. 0.15 cm
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Transfer from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1978.495.79
UNPUBLISHED


74 75 76 77 78

Byzantine spinning and sewing implements were not very different from those of the ancient world. The development of the drawloom in the early Byzantine period was a great advance for weaving technology, but basic tools such as the spindle for spinning thread and needles for sewing cloth remained the same. The implements were often made from the strong bones of cattle or oxen. This spindle (cat. 74) consists of a shaft with a V-shaped slit at the top for attaching thread and a disc (whorl) at the bottom that acted as a weight to help twist the fiber. The spinner twisted the spun thread around the spindle until the spindle was full, and the thread became a skein for weaving.[1] Spindles were usually made of wood; whorls were made of a variety of materials, including wood, stone, bronze, terracotta, or bone. Several bone spindles and whorls similar to cat. 74 have been found at sites in Greece and at Dura-Europos.[2]

Polished to a smooth finish, the bone needles have a rectangular eye and are sharpened asymmetrically to a point. Needles were also made of other materials, such as wood and iron, and varied in their fineness.[3] Weaving implements, including books of needles, were often found in women's graves in Egypt.[4]

Weaver's combs were also found in graves and in houses from the early Byzantine period.[5] With their small, shallow teeth, the combs were used to pack down woven threads

79 Weaver's Comb

Egypt, Coptic, 10th–11th century
Wood
L. 25.3 cm, w. 13.8 cm, d. 2.0 cm
The Art Museum, Princeton University, Gift of Charles Rufus Morey, y1946-79
PUBLISHED *Byzantium at Princeton* 1986, 55–56, cat. 24.

on a loom. They are usually made of wood and are rectangular in shape. In the center of cat. 79 is the figure of a standing woman holding a cross before her chest with both hands. She wears a crown similar to the type worn by Tyche figures (see cats. 1, 4b).[6] She is flanked by two columns carved in spiral shapes; each column is grasped by a naked angel flying toward the center and holding a wreath encircling a cross. It is not clear who is represented here. The Christian symbolism is emphasized. MFH

1. Rutschowscaya 1990, 25.
2. *I, Claudia* 1996, 93, cat. 60, and 157, cat. 103; *Daily Life* 2002, 370, cats. 447, 448.
3. *I, Claudia* 1996, 157, cat. 104.
4. Rutschowscaya 1990, 29–30.
5. Ibid.; Rassart-Debergh 1997, 106. See also *Beyond the Pharaohs* 1989, 13, for a group of weaving implements, including a comb, taken from a windowsill of a house in Karanis, Egypt.
6. For a fifth-century hair comb with a seated Tyche, see *Daily Life* 2002, 462–63, cat. 631.

79

80 Textile Fragment with Flourishing Vine

Egypt, Byzantine, 5th–6th century
Wool
L. 16.5 cm, w. 16.5 cm
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Gift of Denman W. Ross, 1917.110

COLLECTION HISTORY Denman W. Ross collection.

UNPUBLISHED

This fragment is a good example of an all-wool textile, which allows for extensive use of brightly dyed yarn as a background. The use of red here may be compared to that in the Louvre's "Sabine shawl," where panels depicting mythological scenes, putti, and animals are placed against a deep red background.[1] Cat. 80 also may have been part of a shawl or winter garment.

In the roundel, a stylized and symmetrical vine with large leaves and grape clusters grows from a volute krater with a footed base. The flourishing-vine motif depicted in the roundel is common in Byzantine textiles. Often, the vines bear fruit and are tended by putti.[2] The vine has a long tradition in textile production; in early classical examples it is associated with Dionysos and may symbolize fecundity. In Christian iconography, the vase with a flourishing vine is often associated with the rite of baptism: the vase represents the body, and the vine, the rebirth of the soul. The flourishing vine was also used to refer to Christ, who preached, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman" (John 15:1). MFH

1. The color reconstruction of this textile is shown in Rutschowscaya 1990, 94–95.

2. Ibid., 91.

80

81

81 Roundel with Multicolored Ivy Leaves

Egypt, Byzantine, 7th–8th century
Wool and linen
L. 16.5 cm, w. 16 cm
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Gift of Denman W. Ross, 1917.111

COLLECTION HISTORY Denman W. Ross collection.

UNPUBLISHED

This fragment is a good example of the range of colors available to weavers in the early Byzantine period. While some Coptic textiles have lost their vibrant colors through burial in tombs or extensive exposure to light, many remain surprisingly bright. Most dyes used in Coptic textiles are colorfast, and their stability allows a revealing glimpse of color preferences in clothing and home decoration.

Wool fiber accepts dye more readily than linen fiber, and the majority of decorative tapestries produced in Egypt have a dyed-wool weft and a natural-linen warp. The weaver of the roundel used a range of colored yarn, including pink, red, yellow, orange, green, and several shades of blue, in addition to bleached white. Most dyes were derived from plant materials, although a red dye was often made from the eggs of the *kermes*, an insect found on the Mediterranean coast. Another type of red dye, known as "lac dye," was made from red resin produced by an insect that lives on trees in India. This type of dye began to be used more frequently in Egypt following the Arab invasion, when trade to the north was interrupted.[1]

This roundel may have been used to decorate a linen tunic or shawl. Its design of leaves and vines and its multicolor border are typical of later Coptic textiles, which often emphasize color and repeated abstract motifs.[2] These differ from the two-tone coloring and figural motifs commonly found on earlier Egyptian Byzantine clothing. The change in taste may have been influenced by the newly established Arab culture in Egypt. MFH

1. Rutschowscaya 1990, 27–29.

2. Du Bourguet 1964, 355, cat. G34, and 458, cat. G287.

82 Eight-Pointed Star Tapestry

Egypt, Byzantine, 4th century
Wool and linen
Diam. 28 cm
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Gift of the Hagop Kevorkian Foundation in memory of Hagop Kevorkian, 1975.41.13

COLLECTION HISTORY Hagop Kevorkian collection.

UNPUBLISHED

This tapestry panel in the shape of an eight-pointed star composed of two squares, one superimposed on the other and rotated, is an excellent example of both geometric decoration and the use of a "flying shuttle." Motifs such as this one are very common in textiles produced in Egypt in the third and fourth centuries,[1] although eight-pointed stars within a circle are more common than the star motif standing alone.[2] The background is usually dark purple wool, and details are rendered in bleached wool or linen thread. In the intricate technique of the flying shuttle, often used for such detail, an extra thread is added on top of the weft to create the design against the purple ground: the shuttle "flies" across portions of the warp instead of weaving in and out.[3] The high contrast in colors and the fineness of the pale thread yields a very delicate effect.

In this piece, a central roundel contains a pattern of diamonds and circles. Stylized vines grow out of the roundel into each point of the star, and white threads fill in the background. This decorative panel may have been used on clothing, such as a shawl. MFH

1. Du Bourguet 1964, 54, cats. A10 and A11, and 78, cat. B131; Kendrick 1920, vol. 1, cat. 204.

2. Rutschowscaya 1990, 48.

3. Ibid., 32–33.

82

83 The Annunciation

Touton, Fayum, Egypt, Coptic, 913/4
Parchment
H. 35.1 cm, w. 26.8 cm
Inscription, in Coptic: above figures, "The Holy Virgin/ Gabriel bringing glad tidings"; between figures, "Hail woman full of grace, the Lord [is] with you" (Luke 1:28)
The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of J. P. Morgan (1867–1943); 1924. MS M.597

COLLECTION HISTORY Produced at the Monastery of the Virgin in Apa Silvanus (Selbane), Egypt; found in 1910 at the Monastery of Saint Michael, near Al-Hamuli (Sôpehes), Egypt; purchased in Paris in 1911 for Pierpont Morgan.

PUBLISHED Cramer 1964, 143, cat. 25, pl. 69; Leroy 1974, 55, 103, 204, pl. 35; Urbaniak-Walczak 1992, 167–69, cat. 23; Depuydt 1993, vol. 1, 205–7, cat. 107, pl. 10; *L'art copte* 2000, 185, cat. 199.

The Virgin Mary, nimbed and wrapped in a purple cloak, sits on a throne, facing front. She raises her left hand toward her face, perhaps in a gesture of surprise. In her right hand she hold a spindle and distaff; to her left sits a basket with three additional spindles. On the right side of the page stands the archangel Gabriel, carrying a staff in his left hand and turning slightly toward the Virgin. Nimbed and draped in a mantle, he raises his right arm in her direction; his right hand is positioned in a gesture of speech. As indicated by the inscription, he announces to the Virgin that she will be the mother of Christ. The image introduces the subsequent texts in the manuscript: Demetrios of Antioch's "Homily on the Incarnation" (fols. 1r–45v) and Cyril of Jerusalem's "Homily on the Virgin Mary" (fols. 46r–74v).[1]

Spinning and weaving featured throughout ancient and medieval times as symbols of female discipline and morality. The Virgin Mary is often shown at the Annunciation in the act of spinning, a perennial reminder of her industriousness and virtue.[2] This image might also have served, however, as a reminder of the Virgin's unique authority in the Christian world order. Proclus, the fourth-century Constantinopolitan cleric and confidant of the empress Eudokia, invented a metaphor for the Virgin, calling her womb a textile workshop in which God wove the tapestry of Christ's body.[3] The Virgin's flesh was "the interlocking warp thread" of this textile.[4] This metaphor elevated the quintessential female activity of textile production to the most sacred and noble act of Christian history.[5] The Virgin spinning at the Annunciation could have been interpreted as a symbolic foreshadowing of the immaculate conception and a reminder of the Virgin's unique authority as the bearer of Christ. AW/IK

1. Depuydt 1993, vol. 1, 205.

2. This iconography appears as early as the fifth century at the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, where a basket of yarn appears next to the enthroned and spinning Virgin (Constas 1995, 181, n. 38).

3. Ibid., 180–83.

4. Ibid., 182.

5. Citing the writings of John Chrysostom, Constas argues that early Church fathers used such metaphors to make theology understandable and to imbue even the most mundane objects with spiritual value (ibid., 193).

83